

PERSONA DOLLS ARE SPECIAL

Persona Dolls are 'friends' that children and adults bond and identify with, and want to get to know and to help.

☑ They **come to visit** usually at a group time (at school, a group etc) or visit on a one to one basis.

☑ You need to think of and treat the Dolls as friends - 'people' in whom you are interested and care about – select or make Dolls that appeal to you. Start with one or two and build up your collection.

☑ Many people prefer large **cloth or rag Dolls** because they are likely to be unique and special – and LOOK different from the dolls in the home corner. Another advantage is that they are more huggable. Care needs to be taken that the dolls you buy or make do not reinforce negative images. 70 cm tall is a good size because children and adults respond well to them and clothes are easy to get hold of: baby clothes size 0-6 months fit them.

You need to have an **even mix of boy and girl** Dolls. Make sure that you introduce a boy Doll early on because children and adults may think that all Dolls are girls. Having boy Dolls can also help to break down gender stereotypes.

☐ The Dolls reflect **and look like a range of South Africans. They represent the group**, and the Dolls also **represent those who are not present**. For example, if there are no children in the group with a hearing impairment one of the Dolls could tell the children about how happy s/he is because she now has a hearing aid and later a story could be told about being teased or excluded.

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□ **Family history, culture, language and religion must be accurate.** People in the community are the best source of information. Details about them and their children can provide the basis on which you can build the persona of each of the Dolls - their gender, class, family structure, type of home, religion, cultural background, languages spoken, physical features, skin colour, special abilities and disabilities, likes and dislikes and a name.

☑ The basic details of each doll's persona **stay the same.**

☑ **Keep a file or notebook** for each doll. Write down each persona you create and of the details that you add during the story telling/ discussion sessions. It is a good idea to look at your notes before telling a story to refresh your memory about the persona of the Doll(s) to be used.

☑ If possible **involve families and groups** in the making and in the buying to ensure that your Persona Dolls are physically and culturally appropriate and disabilities accurately portrayed. You can also make your own Dolls.

PERSONA DOLL STORY TELLING SESSIONS

You, act as an interpreter for the Doll - you are simply **talking 'for' it.** In your everyday speaking voice you tell the children what the Doll has come to tell them about a particular experience or feeling. You can refer to the doll: by letting it 'whisper' in your ear. You then change your role and become **a facilitator.** You and the group have a conversation about what has happened to the Doll, how s/he is feeling, how they are feeling, and what can be done to help. It is an interactive, informal problem-solving process, which begins with you setting the scene, and encouraging the group to share their feelings and ideas.

FOR WHICH ISSUES/ THEMES CAN YOU USE PERSONA DOLLS?

Issues like gender, abuse, health and HIV and AIDS, racism, refugee issues, culture, language, language/accents, faith, diverse families (single parent, gay, orphaned etc), disability, social class, physical appearance – plump or has scars etc. Develop empathy towards others who are different to themselves.

To support 'victims'. So they don't feel alone, and to develop coping skills.

To develop language skills e.g. talking about their feelings and emotions; about their experiences, giving ideas and solutions to the Doll's problems.

Problem solving to try to resolve problems and open up issues for discussion.

Language and Life skills development. v



Persona Doll Training

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

METHOD: HOW TO USE PERSONA DOLLS

You need to bring the Doll to life –so keep the session **short, informative and enjoyable**. About 10 – 15 minutes.

The goal is to capture their attention so they will be interested in what happens to the Doll. Use the group's comments. What they say can also highlight the need for an issue to be the subject of another session, e.g. racist name calling, rejection because of HIV stigma.

Involve the group: get them to do most of the talking. You listen carefully and actively to each person's contributions, repeat them to ensure that everybody has heard.

Take time to listen- and wait for learners to answer questions. **Give them time to think.**

Ask appropriate, open-ended questions: you can encourage naming feelings, listen to each other, think deeply, express their ideas, empathise with the Doll so that they can help and advise it. The process of discussing feelings, ideas and solutions is more important than finding a perfect solution.

You need to make **sure that nobody is humiliated, embarrassed or made to feel bad** when they say what they think or feel. They must feel safe to say anything. Feel accepted.

Create stories that have a range of possible solutions, **ask leading questions**, reflect back what has been said and pick up particularly on the contributions of those who are affected by the situation being discussed.

Stories can help adults; teenagers and adults know that **they are not alone**.

PLANNING

Plan together as a staff team or with a colleague if possible. Decide on the issue or topic. Plan the story (introduction to the discussion) and plan questions, which you will ask to encourage discussion and encourage speaking about feelings.

THE STORY/ DISCUSSION SESSION

- It is important that people care about the characters in the stories. They need to know and understand the **meaning of words that describe emotions**: in their home language – introduce these in the stories. Asking questions like: Do you think s/he feels sad, angry, frustrated, happy? Do you sometimes feel sad? Can you make a sad face (to a child)?
- They **talk about how they feel** and express their emotions e.g. 'I am feeling cross, happy, sad, upset, confused, scared, hurt ' etc.
- Stories reflecting a wide range of diversity provide opportunities to ask questions, discover common experiences, feelings and actions with others who may be very different from themselves.
- Stories enable them to **empathise** with the Dolls and to recognise unfair and hurtful behaviour like name-calling, exclusion and physical abuse. They learn to stand up against unfairness when they experience it in real life. And stand up for their friends, colleagues and family.

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Children and Persona Dolls

- **Problem solving skills** involve being able to think flexibly and critically, to think of different solutions, to describe the problems and to listen to everyone's views.
- To encourage children and adults to think deeply about issues they need to be experience many sessions and to **respect** and recognise that each Doll, like them, has its own type of family, home, language, culture, abilities. As the user of the Doll you also need to show respect for the Doll and the children.
- Present simple and straightforward problems – the younger the children the simpler the problems. Show them that there are **lots of ways to solve a problem** and encourage them to think about why the Doll acted or spoke in a particular way. Experiences like these can provide children with skills to solve their own problems and enable them to **express their own feelings**.

ENDING A STORY/ DISCUSSION SESSION

- Keep the ending of a story, like the introduction, short and simple – about six or seven sentences to bring it to an appropriate, but not always a perfect, conclusion.
- Include the group's **contributions**, particularly those that most closely match the goal of the story. This can make them feel good about themselves and about being part of the group.
- Balance happy and sad stories. Remember that not all problems can easily be solved.
- If the story has been an unhappy one, reassure the children that the Doll is feeling much happier and thanks them for caring and helping to solve her/his problem. The Doll can report back at the next visit.

The Persona Doll approach helps develop emotional intelligence.

In his book 'Emotional Intelligence' Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as

- knowing one's feelings and using them to make good decisions in life
- being able to manage moods and control impulses
- being motivated and effectively overcoming setbacks in working towards goals

Contact us for more information and to order Persona Dolls and Manuals in Xhosa, Afrikaans and English

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